

JESPER JUST. NOMAD IN ONE'S OWN MIND

CURATOR: ANNE-MARIE NINACS



SEPTEMBER 7 – OCTOBER 8, 2011



Jesper Just, *Romantic Delusions*, 2008, still.

Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Emmanuel Perrotin, Paris.

WAYS OF THINKING

Ways of Thinking is designed for anyone interested in exploring contemporary art and its exhibition framework. It offers succinct and synthesized information on the exhibition's concept, the artists and the works featured. For the complete version of *Ways of Thinking* that includes bibliographic references, please see our website: www.ellengallery.concordia.ca/2006/en/

The Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery presents Jesper Just's first solo exhibition in Canada, *Nomad in One's Own Mind*, as part of the 12th edition of Le Mois de la Photo à Montréal 2011. Featuring five videos made over the past decade, this exhibition encapsulates many of the key interests that have marked this Danish artist's oeuvre.

In the past ten years, Jesper Just has become known for his short dialogue-free films combining melodrama with film noir, featuring people in enigmatic emotional relationships, with music playing a prominent narrative role. Just presents these ambivalent, two-sided, and often homoerotic amorous situations, which form the essence of his oeuvre, by diverting Hollywood movies' dramatic tension and emotional twists to reveal their normative dimension and, conversely, expose the complete spectrum of human relationships and emotions as normal facts of life. In his recent works, he frequently turns to lone figures – “nomads in their own minds” – through whom he revisits his favourite themes of confused feelings, sexual ambivalence, and vulnerability.

Acceptance of the complex movements of the mind and the often contradictory motives underlying human relationships is an essential exercise for anyone seeking greater awareness. Repeatedly modelling this acceptance in the subjects that they address and casting the viewer in the role of an empathetic witness, Just's films are inward-focused views that exemplify the questions raised by the theme *Lucidity*.

Anne-Marie Ninacs

Jesper Just was born in 1974 in Copenhagen, where he graduated from the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts. He lives and works in New York. He has had more than forty solo exhibitions, including at BALTIC in the U.K., the John Curtin Gallery in Australia, and MAC/VAL–Musée d'art contemporain de Val-de-Marne in France, all in 2011; the Tampa Museum of Art (2010); the Museum of Contemporary Art, Detroit (2009); La Casa Encendida, Madrid (2008); the Victoria Miro Gallery, London (2008); the Miami Art Museum; and the Ursula Blickle Foundation, Kraichtal, Germany (2007). His works are in many prestigious collections, including the Museum of Modern Art and the Guggenheim Museum in New York; the Tate Gallery in London; and Luxembourg's Musée d'art moderne Grand-Duc Jean. He is represented by Emmanuel Perrotin Gallery in Paris.

A VOYAGE IN DWELLING, 2008

Video projection
Super 16mm film transferred to DVD
11 min. 11 sec., sound

A Voyage in Dwelling is part of a trilogy produced by Just in 2008, which also includes the films *A Question of Silence* and *A Room of One's Own* (not presented). Alone on an island, the actress Benedikte Hansen enters her house; then, with changing emotions, she moves through the place, which, as she walks, is transformed into a series of hallways. Finally, she re-emerges on the bridge of a ship on the high seas, still alone. This deliberately ambiguous scenario offers a rich metaphor for the wanderings and depths of the psyche, for it seems that the middle-aged woman is actually travelling through and discovering new spaces within herself and confronting, from one island to the next, her existential solitude. The artist also sees this as an image of self-transformation: "The received paradigm of a man's journey is that he always returns to the point of departure expecting to find his home and his wife unchanged. Benedikte's experience, by contrast, is one of pleasurable displacement – she becomes a nomad in her own mind, never returning to her former status quo."¹

EXPLORE

- the feeling of confinement produced by the rooms and hallways with no exterior;
- the images that you construct of your psychic space and your psychological depths.

NO MAN IS AN ISLAND, 2002

DVCAM video on monitor
4 min., sound

When he arrived at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts to study visual arts and drawing, Just, influenced by the talented video artists around him (Peter Land, Gitte Villesen, Joachim Koester, Ann Lislegaard, Lisa Strömbeck, etc.), became interested in video himself. For his early works, such as *No Man Is an Island*, he worked directly in the street with one or two actors and scripted happenings that he filmed himself involving

unexpected events that took place on site. It is remarkable that the actor Johannes Lilleøre, chosen by Just to be his alter ego, and the themes of complexity of desire, human emotion, and intergenerational relations that characterize his later works were already in evidence in this short video. The image of the island also became a recurrent element in his world, as can be seen in the works *A Voyage in Dwelling* and *Romantic Delusions*. Just borrows from the English poet John Donne (1572–1631): "All mankind is of one author, and is one volume ... No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main ... Any man's death diminishes me ..." (Meditation XVII).

EXPLORE

- the fact that Just gives his actors motivations that he does not reveal to his audience, thus countering the traditional cinematographic narration that makes us complicit in the characters' motivations;
- the explanation that you would give for the behaviour of each character.

BLISS AND HEAVEN, 2004

Video projection
Super 16mm film transferred to DVD
8 min. 10 sec., sound

The inspiration for *Bliss and Heaven* comes from Trent Harris's cult film *Beaver Trilogy* (2001), in which an American teenager obsessed with Olivia Newton John plays the singer in an amateur show. Just displaces this situation and inserts it into an ambiguous relationship between two men. A well-built truck driver tacitly invites a young man into the trailer of his semi, giving the impression that a homosexual encounter will occur. We realize quickly, however, that the trucker is inviting the other man into his most private, intimate space; the narrow trailer contains the theatre of his emotions. Here, the lyrics of *Please Don't Keep Me Waiting*, as sung by the trucker dressed up as Newton John, are a substitute for the absence of dialogue between the characters, shedding light on the nature of their relationship, while the music conveys the emotion. "I use songs as the exchange of love between characters."²

EXPLORE

- the ways in which Hollywood movies influence our expectations about feminine and masculine roles and the emotions we associate with them.

ROMANTIC DELUSIONS, 2008

Three-channel video projection
8 mm film transferred to DVD
10 min. 25 sec., sound

Filmed in Bucharest, Romania, with limited technical resources, *Romantic Delusions* presents Just's deliberate return to the more improvised working method of his early career after a number of years of sophisticated film production – a way for the artist to place himself in artistic danger and resist

the commercial appropriation of his works. The triple projection's main character is a hermaphrodite inspired by Herculine Barbin, who committed suicide in the nineteenth century, about whom Michel Foucault wrote a short work. Wandering nervously on the streets of the city, as if he-she cannot find his-her place, the man-woman suddenly transits into a dreamlike world. The character finds himself-herself alone at a window facing the ocean as if at a final frontier, and finishes his-her journey in Ceausescu's palace of a thousand rooms – the biggest palace in the world and an excellent metaphor for the unplumbable depths of the psyche – singing out his-her pain in a castrato voice in the middle of an indifferent crowd. "I mean, for me, it's not a freak, it's just a person that's struggling," explains Just.³

EXPLORE

- how the unsynchronized triple projection and the confused identity of a Bucharest caught between a dictatorial communist past and Americanization reflect the main character's inner conflict;
- the parts of your own personality that demand to be expressed.

SOME DRAUGHTY WINDOW, 2007

Video projection
16mm film transferred to DVD
8 min., sound

In *Some Draughty Window*, Just questions the most sensitive taboos in society today: the emphasis on ageing, the desires of old people, and sexual ambiguity. The slow levitation of the old man-woman, who we initially find prone on a tiled bathroom floor on the verge of death, acts as a movement of regeneration. The character's airborne dance among the trees symbolizes a gentle celebration of the male-female, life-death, decline-rebirth principles that are the dialectical force of the material world.

EXPLORE

- the effect produced by this ambiguous character compared to the well-defined heroes and heroines that movies for the general public and advertising encourage us to desire and into which they invite us to project ourselves.

1 Jesper Just, quoted in the press release for the exhibition *A Voyage in Dwelling*, Victoria Miro Gallery, London, May 2008, http://www.victoria-miro.com/exhibitions/_385/. Last consulted 26 March 2011.

2 Jesper Just, in an interview with Rose Lee Goldberg. See "Jesper Just," *Bomb*, no. 96 (Summer 2006), <http://bombsite.com/issues/96/articles/2837>. Last consulted March 26, 2011.

3 Jesper Just, quoted in Lilian Davies, "Romantic Delusions," *Idoménée*, no. 3 (3 December 2008): 276, http://www.galerieperrotin.com/press/Jesper_Just-press-41.html. Last consulted 30 March 2011.

Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery

Concordia University

1400 boul. de Maisonneuve West, LB 165

Montreal (Quebec) H3G 1M8

Metro Guy-Concordia

T 514.848.2424 #4750

ellengal@alcor.concordia.ca

www.ellengallery.concordia.ca



UNIVERSITÉ
Concordia
UNIVERSITY



LE MOIS DE
LA PHOTO
A MONTRÉAL

LEAFLET PRODUCED WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE *FREDERICK AND MARY KAY LOWY ART EDUCATION FUND*. THE LEONARD & BINA ELLEN ART GALLERY'S CONTEMPORARY EXHIBITION PROGRAM IS SUPPORTED BY THE CANADA COUNCIL FOR THE ARTS.